

Models of Health and illness

Not everyone believes in the biomedical model. The acknowledgment of different beliefs is important. People differ in what they perceive as a symptom. Some cultures do not believe in X-rays, the germ theory of disease, or injections. Some religions propose that sickness and death are caused by past life events. For example, many eastern religions explain the occurrence of cancer and other diseases in terms of the philosophy of karma, which attributes life events to the accumulation of good or bad deeds. Beliefs such as these may be an underlying issue when a patient is unwilling to adhere to a given treatment or adopt a health promoting behaviour.

The concept of prevention may be a novel one to some people. For example, many people who settle in Australia come from poorly resourced countries where the health system is barely able to provide adequate clinical, curative care, and where public health budgets are so low as to

preclude attention to health promotion and prevention of life-style diseases.

Ascertain the perceived cause of a health problem, the usual treatment within the culture and the extent to which the patient is prepared to accept an alternative form of treatment.

See *Questions to Elicit the Patient's Explanatory Model* in the *Checklists for Cultural Assessment*. In some instances, it may be possible to combine different treatment methods, for instance the use of a cultural broker and medication, or herbal infusions and a surgical procedure.

Note that beliefs often but do not always affect practice.

